

Health Care Guidelines for SCDDSN

INTRODUCTION

What are health care guidelines?

Health care guidelines are statements that provide direction to the health care professional in making decisions about appropriate health care for specific clinical situations. Guidelines provide linkages among clinical conditions, interventions, and outcomes of care that is provided to individuals or groups of people. In addition, guidelines provide a basis for review of care and allocation of resources. The health care guidelines included in this manual were developed to assist nurses, physicians, and other members of the health care team to make decisions about health care for individuals with developmental disabilities and establish a means to review practice.

Why were the *Health Care Guidelines* developed?

The goal of the *Health Care Guidelines* is to describe a recommended course of action for specific conditions or procedures. These guidelines have the potential to improve the quality of clinical decision-making. The guidelines are intended to help nurses, physicians, and others involved in clinical decision-making by describing recommended courses of action for various clinical situations specific for individuals with developmental disabilities.

How are guidelines used?

The *Health Care Guidelines* reflect recommended options for care and define the boundaries of proper practice. The guidelines can be used to review the adequacy and appropriateness of health care practice. While these guidelines were developed to address the typical clinical conditions of individuals with developmental disabilities, not every guideline may be appropriate or applicable for every individual. In addition, not all interventions that are within a particular guideline may be applicable or indicated. Using practice guidelines to review health care practices, therefore, requires that nurses, dentists, physicians, and other health care professionals use clinical judgment to evaluate the appropriateness of the guideline(s) to meet individual's needs.

How will this manual be helpful to health care professionals?

This manual consists of several guidelines that highlight areas of concern when providing health care to individuals with developmental disabilities. The guidelines will provide direction to nurses, physicians, and other health care providers in making decisions about health care needs, implementing health care, and providing adequate documentation.

The guidelines can serve many purposes when comparing the actual care provided and the level of care outlined in the guidelines. First, if there are few or explained differences between care actually provided and the level of care outlined in the guideline, the review process confirms that high quality health care is being provided. Second, by identifying differences between actual practice and the level of care established by the guidelines, the health care team can identify priority areas for planning and implementing needed changes. Third, technical assistance teams can use the guidelines to identify areas where assistance may be needed to improve health care. Fourth, the guidelines may also help identify areas where resources are needed to attain or maintain the desired level of health care. This information may assist health care administrators in making decisions about the distribution of resources.